

PROJECT RIO



At just 23 years of age, Australian triathlete Emma Jackson already has the 2012 Olympics under her belt. Now, with her sights firmly set on Rio, Emma's teamed up with up-and-coming Australian performance sports brand, Project Clothing, in her bid for the podium.

**WORDS: LIZZY FOWLER
IMAGES: KORUPT VISION**

Back in 2012, Australian triathlete Emma Jackson made headlines with a somewhat controversial selection for the London Olympics ahead of defending Olympic Gold medallist, Emma Snowsill. Aged just 21, it was a brutal, yet educational, introduction to the stresses that go hand in hand with qualifying for an all-important event and, with just eight weeks to prepare for the biggest race of her professional career, it's perhaps unsurprising Jackson left London disheartened with her eighth place position.

Fast forward three years, and Jackson now has her sights firmly set on the Rio Olympics. However, having already competed at the 2012 Olympics and 2014 Commonwealth Games, Jackson isn't taking anything for granted, especially as she's currently facing her first injury in six years.

Jackson's road to the top is well documented. A talented swimmer, netball player and cross country runner hailing from the outskirts of Brisbane, Jackson shone from a young age, and took out first place at the 2004 Australian Cross Country Championships, aged just 13. Yet, whilst running remains her preferred discipline to this day, back then it began to lose its shine.

"By the time I was 14 or 15 I wasn't enjoying it as much as I used

mentally draining, even though it may not seem like it at the time. I will be doing my best this year to try and gain the automatic position."

Yet the young Aussie isn't letting the pressure get to her. "I'm just going about my thing, not thinking about it too much and doing the best I can," she says with an attitude and wisdom that reflects the experience she has already accumulated at such a young age. "I've been competing for seven or eight years, but I still have to work on everything, so I'm going about my every-day training, trying to get the little things right, so that I can perform well when it matters."

Of course, each season brings new challenges, and Jackson is currently dealing with her first major injury, which meant missing out on the first race of the season thanks to a sacral fracture.

"It's my first major injury since I was 17 years old, so I've found it hard to deal with," she admits. "I wasn't sure what to expect so I've taken it quite hard."

In true form, however, Jackson is dealing with it, and has taken the opportunity to focus on areas other than running, in order to keep herself motivated. Whilst her training regime would normally include 6 to 8 running sessions a week, accumulating between 60 and 100km, running is currently off the menu, the focus instead

"During her first ever triathlon, Jackson famously completed the cycle leg in a single gear"

to," says Jackson, who spoke to us just days after missing out on competing in the Abu Dhabi Triathlon, which kicked off the World Triathlon Series for 2015. "I decided to give triathlon a go, although I knew nothing about the sport."

Indeed, during her first ever triathlon, Jackson famously completed the cycle leg in a single gear – too scared to take her hands off the handlebars – and readily admits her coach, Stephen Moss, who spotted Jackson at a young age, still has to keep her disciplined when it comes to splitting her training evenly between swimming, running and cycling.

It was with the move to triathlon that Jackson's childhood fantasy of competing in the Olympics started to become more of a reality. "I always wanted to make sport my career, and take it as far as I could go," she says. "I am aware, however, that with running it's hard to be competitive on an international level. When I moved to triathlon, competing on a global level became more of a reality, and that's when I started to think seriously about the Olympics."

Of course, Jackson's dream came a reality in 2012, when she lined up alongside her fellow athletes as the second youngest triathlete competing in London. Having already proven herself to her home crowd as the next-big-thing with her 2009 win at the Noosa Triathlon, this was her opportunity to shine on a global stage. And shine she did, staying with the front-runners until the second half of the run leg, eventually placing a credible eighth.

Since then, Jackson's focus has been on Rio. And whilst she dreams of taking a medal, selection for the Australian team is never guaranteed, especially with such a talented stable of female triathletes currently competing on the circuit.

"I'd love to go to Rio and represent Australia in the next Olympics," says Jackson, whose hunger for the next Games has only been fuelled by her experience last time around. "Selection is my main focus for this year." Indeed, 2015 is all about Rio.

"A major lesson I learnt from the selection process for the London Olympics is how important it is to try and gain automatic selection so you don't need to worry about the discretion process," she says. "Going through the whole discretionary selection process is



Emma's custom made Project Clothing Tri Supersuit has been extensively tested to ensure speed both in and out of the water.

being on swimming and cycling.

Helping her through this experience is, of course, her longstanding coach, Stephen Moss, with whom she's trained with since the age of 15. "We have a really good relationship," she says. "We've had highs and lows together, and we help each other through. When I got to go to the Olympics, it wasn't just my first Olympics, it was Steve's first as a coach, too."

Yet Jackson has a new relationship to nurture in 2015 – and one that could turn out to be just as advantageous in the long term as her collaboration with Moss – having recently been announced as an ambassador for the young Australian brand, Project Clothing.

Known for their performance sportswear, Project Clothing has been working closely with Jackson to develop and improve upon custom kit for Jackson to compete in.

"Like me, Project Clothing are up-and-coming, and they're an Australian brand," says Jackson when asked why she decided to work with Project Clothing. "I've never worked this closely with a brand, and I've enjoyed the fact that the brand really listens to my feedback and adjusts even small things to meet and exceed my expectations when it comes to race wear."

Owner of Project Clothing, Graeme Clarke, is excited to have Jackson on board – someone he himself cherry picked to represent the brand. "It was important to me that we choose ambassadors based on more than performance," says Clarke, who has in just 18 months built a brand that already provides technical team wear to Volleyball Australia, Triathlon Canada and Archery Australia, amongst other sporting teams.

"We are only interested in working with athletes who, like Emma, are dedicated to performance and committed to providing feedback so we can continue to create the best products in terms of fabrics and fits.

"Despite her youth, Emma has been successful for a while," continues Clarke. "She is very genuine and approachable, which comes through in her performance. As she is now focused on a podium position in Rio, she's only interested in working with the best equipment. We believe we can help her get there."

Indeed, since beginning their relationship in January this year, Jackson already worked with them on products such as wetsuits, compression tights and, of course, her all important race suit, each employing fabrics and materials that perform at the highest level.

There's no doubt 2015 is going to be an important year for Jackson as her Olympic hopes unfold. With the support of those around her, including Moss and Project Clothing, her wealth of experience and her refusal to bow to pressure, she's well positioned to fulfil her ambitions in her very own race to Rio. ■



Jackson has her sights firmly set on Rio.

“THE THINGS I WISH I KNEW...”

There is a treasure trove of triathlon knowledge available to help you through your first, and many more triathlons, but here are some gems that **Kylie McCorquodale** wished she knew before diving into her first triathlon...

Transition

Practice your 'transitions' (that magical vortex where you place your bike and running equipment in between the separate legs of the race). On race day, when exiting the water you may feel a little lightheaded and disoriented, resulting in the 'lost puppy' look showing you have forgotten your bike location. Use visual cues as a reminder (a tree or building) or move sequentially through the number signs to spot your equipment.

Swimming

Triathletes often turn into gremlins when you add water. At the swim start you may get whacked, kicked or have your goggles dislodged. Or, you may be the gremlin gone wild trying to get ahead. Either way, it is frustrating so just remember to think lovely karmic thoughts, relax, regroup and keep going.

Cycling

While we are women and multitasking is second nature, there is quite a skill to retrieving, drinking and replacing your drink bottle while cycling. So, practice drinking while cycling before race day arrives.

Know the rules to avoid the embarrassment of sitting in the penalty box. Drafting (riding too closely behind another athlete) and blocking (riding beside another athlete) are considered cheating! In transition, doing up your bike helmet before touching your bike is essential.

Running

Be prepared for the jelly leg feeling of running after your

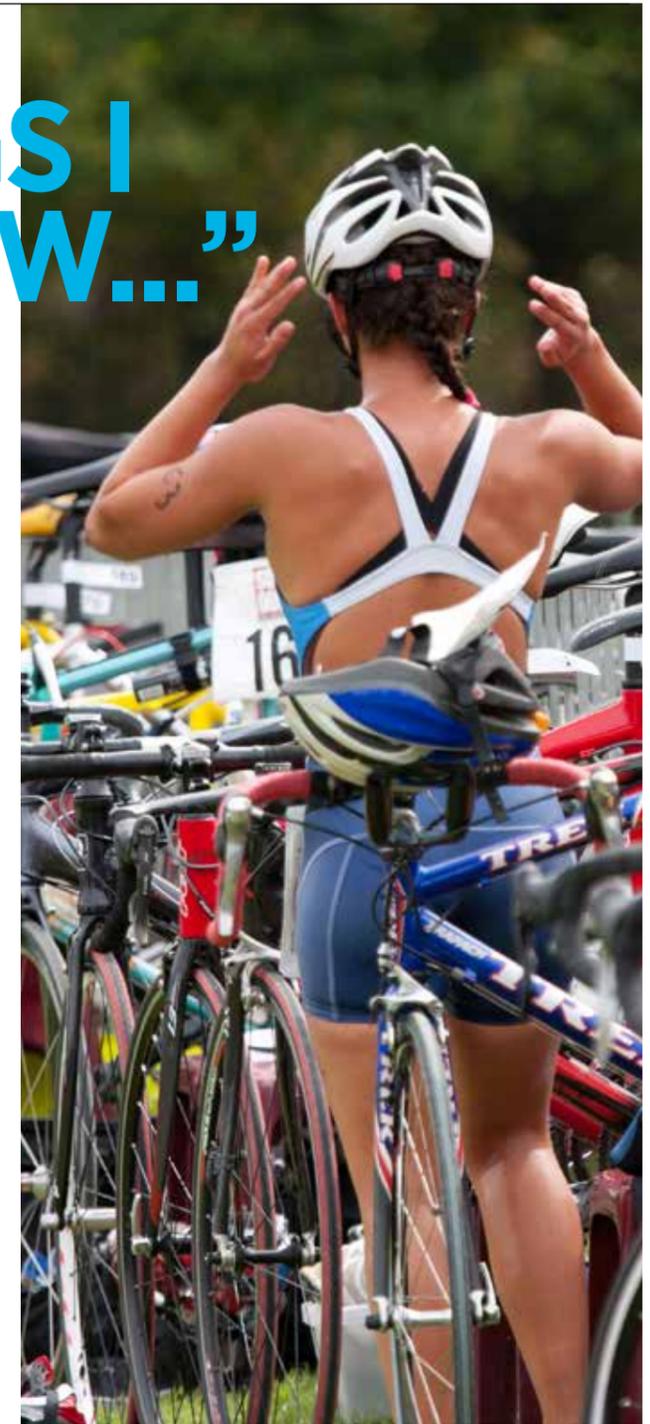
ride, where your legs seem to belong to someone else's body and you appear to have adopted the running style of a newborn foal. You can combat this by doing 'brick sessions' in training, where you run immediately after your bike workout.

You may wet your pants, literally!

Laugh and enjoy the spoils of being a woman where wetting your pants is sometimes out of your control but perfectly acceptable in a triathlon. Hint – splash water over yourself at the drink station and scrub your shoes when you get home. Trust me, avoid letting them dry in your car - it is a difficult scent to remove.

Apply lube and ditch your knickers!

'Lube' offers every triathlete the romance they desire... apply it everywhere to prevent odd body parts rubbing. Chafe is a double whammy of pain. It hurts at the time and leaves a lingering sensation of someone taking a grater to your skin for days afterwards. While we are talking romance, let's get naked! Avoid wearing underwear or swimwear underneath trisuits or bike shorts, they just add to the possibility of raw skin.



Enjoy yourself

Most importantly, SMILE! Apart from the natural endorphin boost and temporary pain amnesia smiling offers, there are cameras everywhere, especially at the finish line. Success is not

always about a personal best time, finishing a triathlon is the main achievement. It may not be a perfect race, but you can race it perfectly, dealing with all the race day situations as they arise. Good luck! ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kylie McCorquodale never knew there were two 5 o'clocks in a day... until she discovered triathlon. Her passion for travel, adventure and triathlon keeps her world expanding and she loves learning and laughing her way through life. Kylie is a wife, mother and high school teacher who always finds the bright side of the day. Follow Kylie's journey towards her first ironman at www.alwaysmypb.wordpress.com or on Instagram - @kyliemcc2.



EMMA'S SECRET WEAPONS

Take a closer look at the bespoke Project Clothing suits Emma will be wearing in the lead up to Rio.



SWIM SUIT

The swimsuit design is unique to Emma and has been altered to allow a GPS unit to be fitted on a pocket on her back so real time data can be analysed by her coaching staff. The suit also uses Project Clothing's latest fabric, which has ceramic core technology to repel heat and block UV whilst remaining extremely fast through the water.



SUPER SUIT

Again, designed with a GPS pocket, the Project Clothing triathlon super suit has been extensively tested to ensure its speed both in and out of the water. The suit features the same hi-tech fabric through the torso and back, but incorporates Project Clothing's superior compression fabric featuring Xtra Lite Lycra® through the quads, hamstrings and gluteus to reduce muscle fatigue and lactate accumulation.